



# 2015 Fires Emergency Communications Colville Indian Reservation

R.L. August

Colville Tribal Office of Public Safety







# How the 2015 Fires Developed

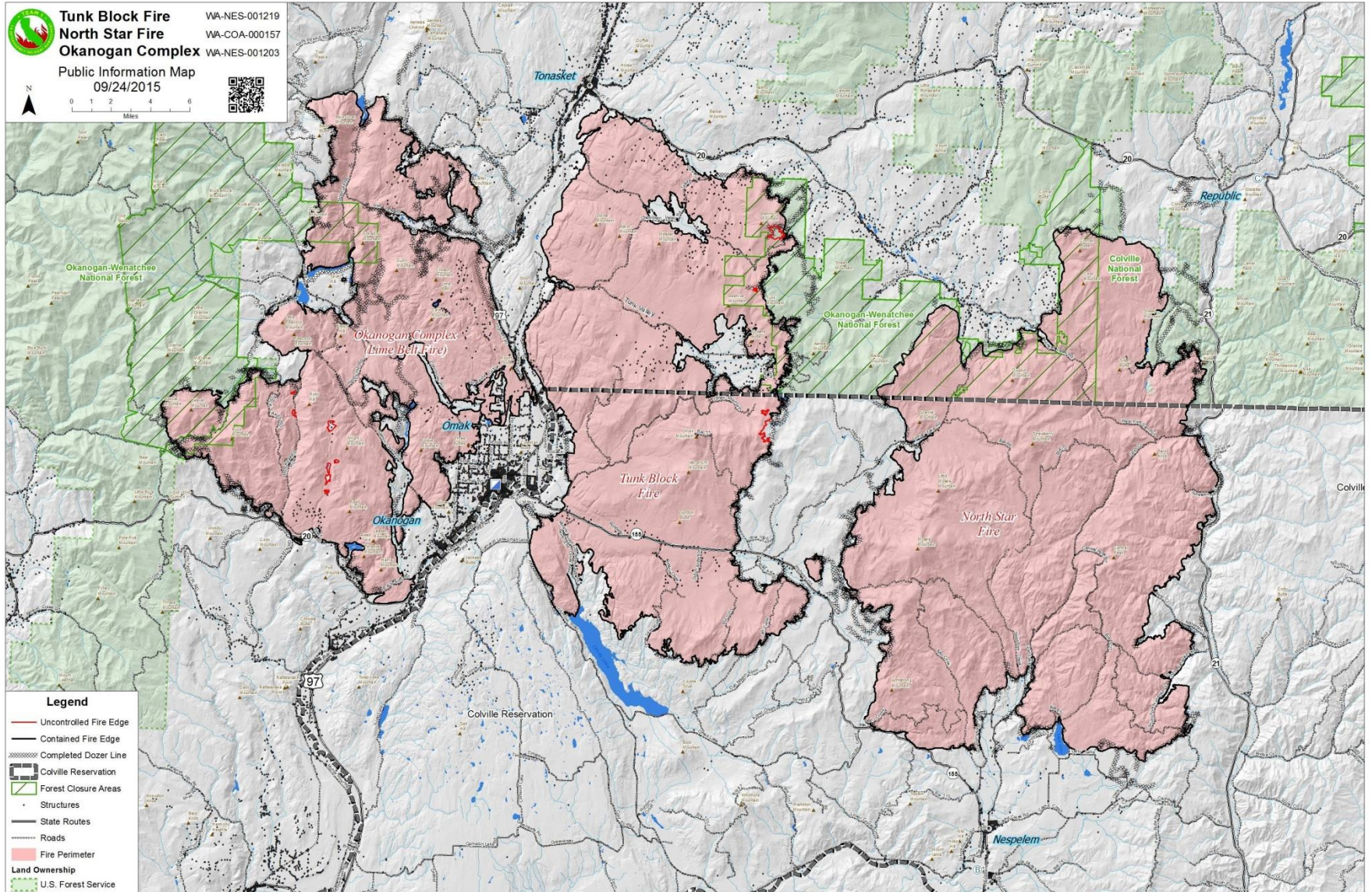
- Multiple lightning strikes
- Large fires in multiple locations
- Resources limited
- Tribal fires low on priority list
- Too many fires, too close together

# Plume Dominated Fires



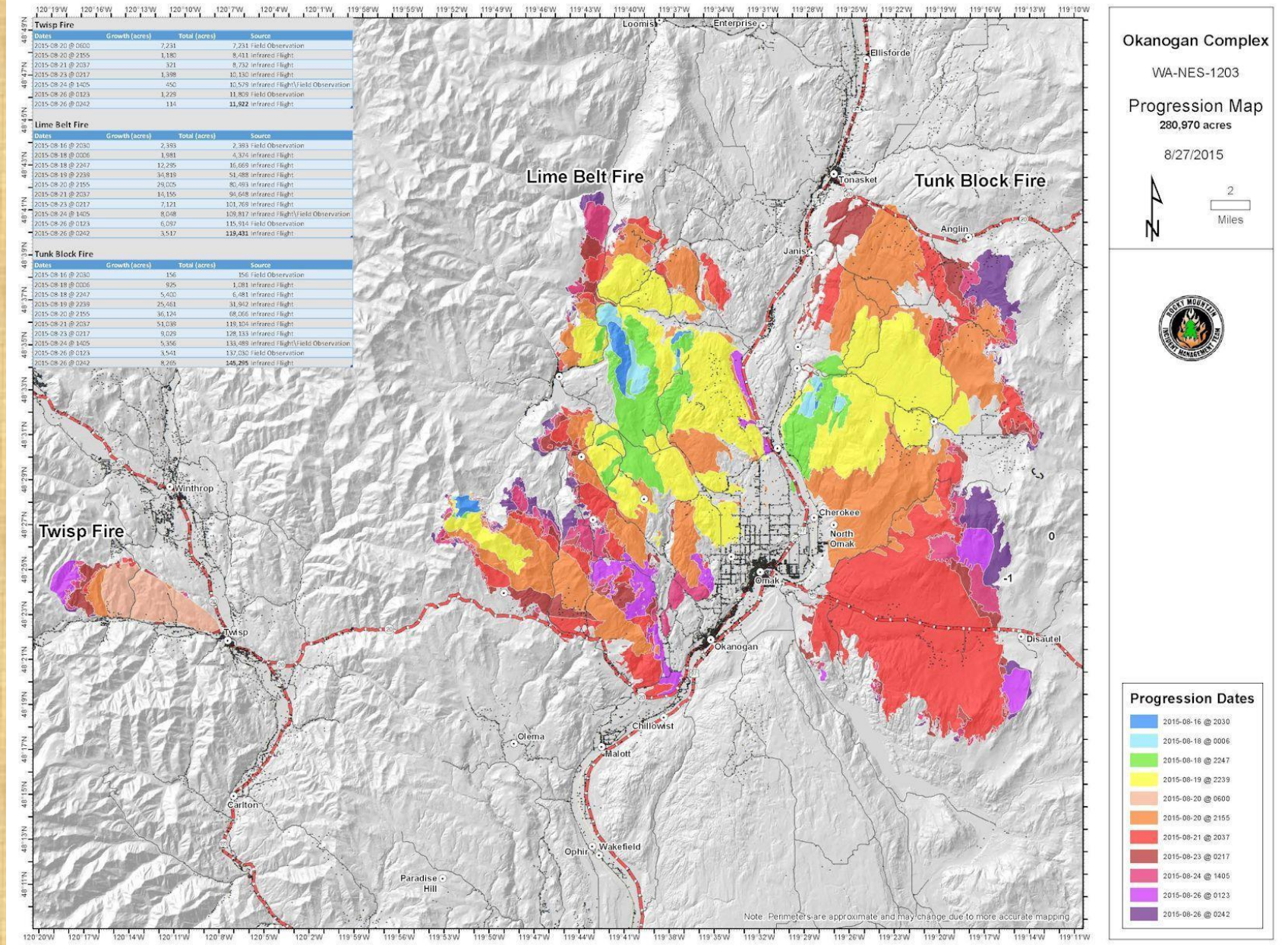


# How It Ended





# One Bad Day--Friday, August 21

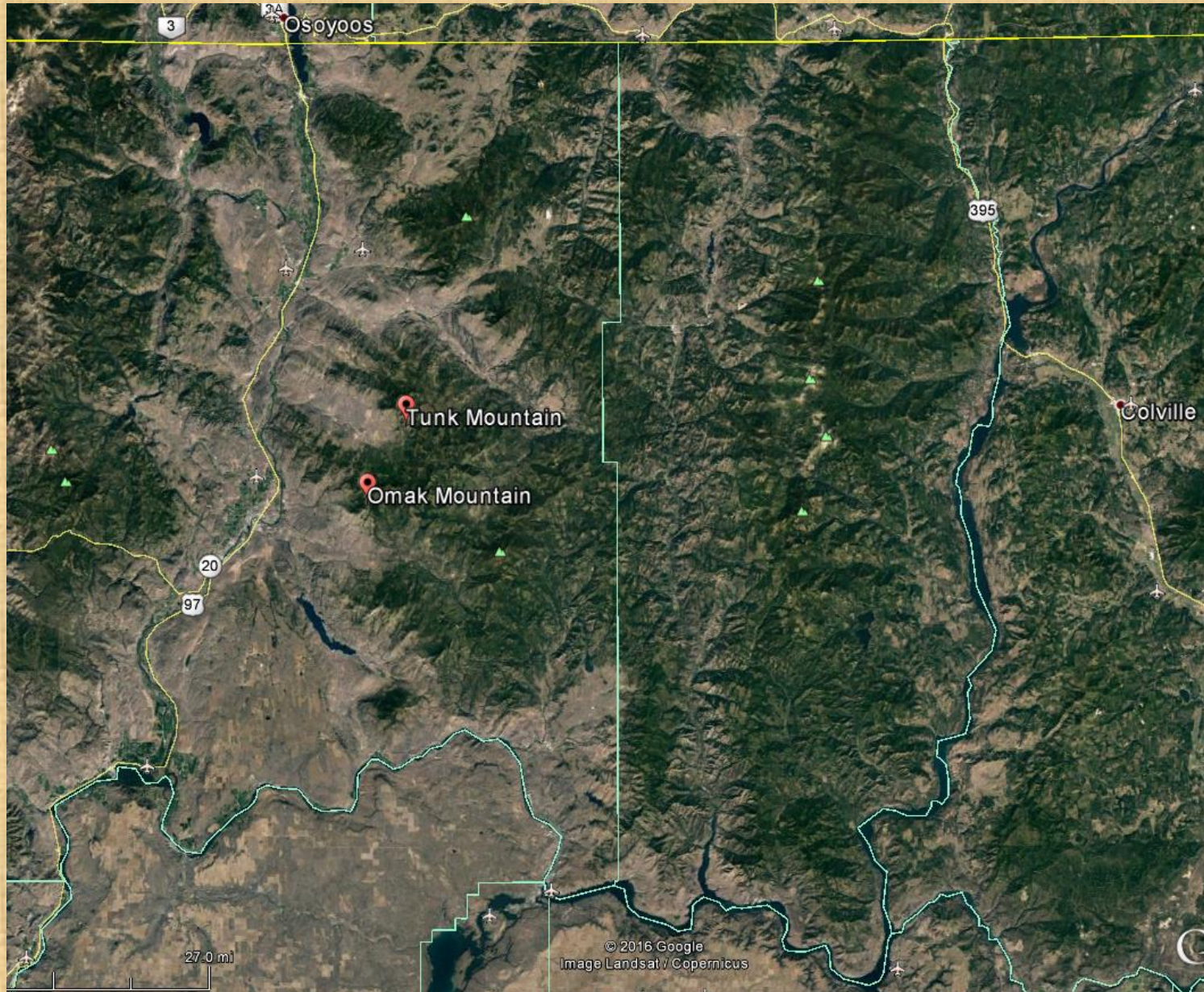


# Where did our coms go?

- Wired phones failed in burned areas
- Cellular coverage affected
  - System damage?
  - Overloaded?
- Radio systems overloaded
- Power lost to com sites
- Potential loss of internet (microwave links)



# A Tale of Two Repeaters







Were these sites fire-ready?



# A Near Miss

- Refueling mission to Omak Mountain repeater site
- Four persons, two trucks, proper safety gear, fire-experienced staff, safety briefing
- Unable to get fire updates (OR return calls) from IMT
- Fire duty officer did not pass on information to supervisor in the field



- Not on incident radio network (IMT base ~40 miles away)
- Agency radio network saturated
- Unable to see fire
- Decided to evacuate
- Vehicle broke down, abandoned on site



- Refueling mission had 5 persons, not 4
- Learned AT & T dispatching staff without fire safety gear or training

# Lessons Learned, or Not

- Ask: Is this mission necessary?
  - Could we have remained operational without internet access?
  - So what if cell service goes down?
- Ham radio works
  - Human failure may interfere
- Need backup coms
  - Ham with (or w/o) FLDIGI applications
  - Satellite?



- Need Unified Area Command NOT just an IMT
  - Our voices were not heard
  - Required state-level pressure to get attention
  - Fire IMTs have difficulty with ‘non-fire’ issues
- Tribal Issues:
  - IMTs do not understand their responsibility to work with Tribes
  - EO and Millennium Accord
- Humans still the largest coms problem

# For further information:

[Randy.August2@colvilletribes.com](mailto:Randy.August2@colvilletribes.com)

509-634-6420

[del.ostenberg.ems@colvilletribes.com](mailto:del.ostenberg.ems@colvilletribes.com)

509-634-2446